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Research finds that sharing housework doesn't mean couples have less sex

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Does sharing the housework cut into couples' sex lives? The authors of a 2013 study would say yes, but new research done by Georgia State sociologists suggests otherwise.

Assistant Professor of Sociology Daniel Carlson and his colleagues Amanda Miller, Sarah Hanson and Sharon Sassler revisit this idea of housework and couples' intimacy in their new study, "The Gender Division of Housework and Couples' Sexual Relationships: A Re-Examination." Earlier research failed to accurately depict the current state of American relationships, the team believes.

The previous study examined data from the late '80s and early '90s, Carlson said. But he and his colleagues used data from a 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS) that sampled low-to-moderate income couples with a minor child.

Their results show an equal division of labor in the home does not lead to a decrease in sexual frequency and satisfaction. Egalitarian couples have similar and sometimes better sex lives than their conventional counterparts.

"Both arrangements are sexy for people," Carlson said. "You can find high quality relationships in both types of relationships. Neither are detrimental."

Carlson believes this new research proves Americans have grown to

favor flexibility not only professionally, but personally.

"Attitudes are a big difference," he said. "Couples today have role models to look at to make this work. In the '80s, egalitarian couples were at the forefront of change. Today's couples have those examples to look to. It makes it a lot easier, resulting in higher quality relationships. I think we've moved to a place where a very stark division of labor is not something people want nor is it something couples want."

While American views of shared housework have changed, women still do most of the housework in most households. Only 30 percent of the couples represented in the MARS survey admitted to sharing household duties.

Carlson is not surprised.

"It is clear what the vast majority of people want," he said. "It's just that right now our social institutions are lagging behind our cultural values. Eventually, as people continue to argue and fight for policies that promote gender equality at home and at work, people will be able to achieve their desires."

Carlson will present the research brief this month at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

Provided by Georgia State University

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